

But, Mr. Speaker, I did break the code on why we're here so late today. I know a lot of people want to know. We can blame Jay Pierson for that. Jay is retiring today. This is his last day, and we wanted to make sure that we got the last ounce of flesh and blood from him. So if the American people want to know why we're here, it's Jay Pierson's fault.

Jay Pierson is Speaker BOEHNER's floor assistant. He obviously carries around a copy of Jefferson's Manual. He has been a servant of the House of Representatives for 34 years. He's a truly dedicated public servant. I thank him for his friendship and his support to this body and especially to me personally.

Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to take time out, as I do, to speak about democratic movements around the world, especially in the former captive nations of Eastern Europe, and remember those who are jailed just because they want political freedoms and liberties.

Two years ago after the brutal and bloody crackdown on peaceful demonstrations after the 2010 presidential elections, the human rights of ordinary Belarusian citizens continue to be violated by the Lukashenko government. One candidate who ran against Lukashenko during that election, Nikolai Statkevich, remains in jail. The other jailed candidate, Andrei Sannikov, was pardoned earlier this year and is in exile in Britain. Ales Byalyatski, the head of Viasna Human Rights Center, also remains imprisoned after being convicted to a 4½-year jail sentence for trumped-up charges of tax evasion. These are two of 12 political prisoners who today remain behind bars under deplorable prison conditions in Belarus.

The general human rights situation in Belarus has not improved since the events of 2010, despite international condemnation and sanctions on the regime. In its 2012 report, Freedom House ranked Belarus as "not free" in the categories of civil liberties and political rights, and Belarus ranked 193 out of 197 countries on Freedom House's 2012 press freedom index. The Reporters Without Borders press freedom index ranks Belarus 168 out of 179 countries.

Laws have passed that regulate demonstrations and political information, stifling freedom of assembly. Independent journalists and political activists are under a constant threat of intimidation and arbitrary detention.

Belarus held parliamentary elections on September 23, 2012. Unsurprisingly, the elections failed to meet international standards and were widely condemned as not free or fair. While some democratic opposition parties boycotted the elections, the candidates who did attempt to run were denied registration by election authorities, intimidated, and given unfair access to media resources. No opposition figures were elected to the 110-seat legislature. Official turnout was reported as 74.3 percent, although observers claim the

turnout was closer to 30 percent of eligible voters.

Belarus remains mired in its worst financial crisis since independence, which has put Lukashenko under increasing pressure. In the past month, he has reshuffled several top figures in his government and made some controversial economic decisions that have been met with criticism in the international community. This includes signing a presidential decree making it illegal for workers in Belarus' wood processing industry to quit their jobs, and announcing that Belarus would begin shifting its exporting business from ports in the Baltic to Russian ports. This will only strain the relationship between Belarus and its democratic neighbors and increase Russia's stronghold on key Belarusian markets.

□ 0940

Belarus already depends on Russia for nearly all its energy supplies. The United States and the European Union must remain united, impose economic sanctions, and have a single plan for action regarding the promotion of democratic process in Belarus.

So again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this time coming down, and I wish everybody a Happy New Year.

FAREWELL TO THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to say farewell to the House.

I first want to say thank you to the wonderful people of the South Carolina coast. From Myrtle Beach to my hometown of North Charleston to Hilton Head, your support over the last 3 years has truly humbled me and inspired me.

I also want to thank my friends, my colleagues, and the members of the South Carolina delegation: Mr. CLYBURN, Mr. WILSON, Mr. DUNCAN, Mr. GOWDY, and Mr. MULVANEY. We have a great group who truly understands we are here to represent the great State of South Carolina and the citizens of America, and I thank them all for their friendship.

Finally, I'd like to thank all of my colleagues here in the House. We may not always agree on things, but we are here for a reason: to try and make this Nation better.

As I prepare to move to the United States Senate, it is that belief that makes me incredibly optimistic about our future. The battles of today will, in the future, be seen as a positive turning point for our Nation, where we got our fiscal house back in order and revitalized the American Dream for our children and our grandchildren.

I look forward to continuing to serve the residents of South Carolina, some

of the most passionate people in the Nation. And I will never forget my time here in the people's House, where we worked every single day to build a brighter future for our Nation.

Thank you.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 10 a.m. today.

Accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 41 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1000

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON) at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer:

Loving God, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

On this last day of 2012, forget not Your people. There are many differences plaguing our Nation's discourse. Please send wisdom upon the leaders serving in government and goodwill among all the principals in current negotiations.

We thank You for the service of so many who work every day in this building, whose labor provides the lubrication for the very public actions of the Members of this assembly. Though each deserves special mention, bless especially this day Jay Pierson, who works his last day of 34 years of faithful service on the floor of the House.

May all that is done this day be for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from New York (Mr. HIGGINS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. HIGGINS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain up to 15 requests